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ABSTRACT

The Urban Leadership Program, a Federally funded program consisting of three 10-week sessions for sixth graders in the Einstein Public School, Chicago, Illinois, provided a career awareness program of action learning to bridge the gap between students' economically improverished neighborhoods and the mainstream urban community. The community centered career program consisted of a two-week internship in a government agency or business, study of the internship career prior to internship, group visits to agencies, and emphasis on individualized reading skills. The staff included a teacher coordinator, a teacher aide, and four community aides with input from parents and resource personnel from various city agencies and businesses. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading Tests, administered as a pre- and post-test in each 10-week session, indicated statistically significant improvement in reading scores. Results of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory were nonsignificant, although a slight improvement in self-esteem levels was reported. A school attitude inventory, constructed for the program, indicated improved school attitudes; strong parental approval of the program was noted in interviews and questionnaires. (EA)

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URBAN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

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Introduction

Children residing in economic impoverished areas in our large urban centers are isolated. Their neighborhoods are effectively "walled" from the mainstream, and the children may well never effectively leave this environment as victims of racial, social and economic discrimination. The schools have been sought out by residents in the depressed areas as providing hope that the lot of their children may improve. Their children will need to be leaders to improve their neighborhoods. To meet this expectation, the youth need an awareness of vocations which will enable them to gain economic security. Only when the youth enter the economic mainstream will they have an opportunity to develop leadership roles in their neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, the children have not gained a reasonable awareness of the world of work. Their parents are poor and living at the raw edge of survival. Their success in schools has been limited. However, a career centered program would provide them opportunities to gain an awareness of the mainstream urban environment.[1] It would be a direct route in providing an entrance to the total city. The program must be developed early in their school careers, and it must be different from the programs with which have not had much success.[2] In a broader context, action learning would provide a sound basis on which to build a career education program for disadvantaged minority children in large urban areas. Action learning includes work experience and educational experiences in community agencies. It provides an alternative to more traditional programs for it is community centered and provides children opportunities to interact with adults in their roles as workers.

It was within this framework of action learning that the Urban Leadership Program in chicago, funded by ESEA Title III, was developed. It was a career education program for pre and early adolescents.

Program Description

The Urban Leadership Program in the Einstein Public School in Chicago was offered to a total of 75 sixth graders during the 1974-75 school year. Each student matriculated in one of three 10 week sessions. The children lived in a severely economic depressed area composed of high-rise public housing.

The major goal of the Urban Leadership Program was to foster the development of cognitive and affective competencies for early adolescents in order to gain a worthy awareness of career opportunities. The Program emphasized action learning by offering the youth "on-the-job" internships, intensive individualized instruction in the basic academic skills, and a community centered curriculum. The curriculum was organized so that field trips, internships, and meetings with individuals representing a wide range of businesses and agencies will be supported by readings and other problem-centered learning activities.

At the beginning of each 10 week session, the needs and interests of the pupils were assessed. The staff which included a teacher coordinator, a teacher aide, and four community aides assisted each student to develop goals for the 10 week session which would ultimately provide an awareness of careers. As much as possible, students selected the careers that would study and later have opportunities to be a participant in the activities of at least one occupation. Each session had common community experiences by studying and visiting agencies which affect all citizens. These agencies included:

1. urban transportation system (rails, busses, airlines),
2. police department,
3. communication (telephone, radio, television, and newspapers),
4. fire department,
5. courts (juvenile and criminal),
6. public utilities,
7. public library,
8. health care agencies,
9. consumerism (supermarkets).

The instructional staff received important input from two additional sources: parents and a city-wide advisory community composed of representatives from various city agencies and businesses. The parents were encouraged to visit the Program Center to discuss their child's learning needs and interests. Near the close of each 10 week session, the community aides would go to the parent's homes to obtain their perceptions of the Program. The city-wide advisory committee never really functioned as initially envisioned. The group really did not operate as a committee due to time commitments (or maybe, priorities) of the members. Instead the members served as resource personnel upon whom the staff could call for their expertise. This procedure operated satisfactorily. An outcome of the advisory committee concept was the development of a questionnaire submitted to all agencies that participated in the Program. This enabled the staff to gain valuable data on which to build the direction of future instructional activities.

A crucial component in the 10 week session was the six to eight day "internship" for each class member in a government agency or business. The student "shadowed" an adult to gain a first hand perspective of how adults work. The youngster reported to the school and each staff member supervised a small group of the students during the day. After the "internship" was completed, the student completed a project which presented a summary of his experiences. The projects have been constructed in two sessions as part of a group effort in order to help students improve their interpersonal skills. One session saw the students develop a a newspaper to explain their experiences to others. The second session class developed a film slide presentation of their career experiences.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the Urban Leadership Program included a variety of measurement procedures. The students were given pre and posttests on each unit studied during the 10 week session. The pretest results were utilized in the development of instructional procedures and curriculum planning for the unit.

The following measures were also included in the evaluation of the project which measured the outcomes of the 10 week sessions: 1) School Attitude Inventory, 2) Self Esteem Inventory and 3) Iowa Test of Basic Skills-Reading.

The School Attitudes Inventory was constructed specifically for this project after a search of the professional literature failed to produce a standardized attitudinal scale. The inventory included 20 items with 1) yes, 2) no and 3) don't know responses for each item. The purpose of the School Attitude Inventory was to determine whether measurable attitude changes toward school would occur over a 10 week span.

The second instrument utilized was the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory.[3] The self esteem level of youth living in economic impoverished areas is an educational and social issue on which voluminous pages have been written. Amazingly, only a limited number of empirical studies evaluating the disadvantaged children exist.[4] Psychologists generally agree that a high self esteem level is associated with good adjustment, acceptance, flexibility, happiness, and freedom from anxiety.[5] The Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory contains 50 items with the two responses being "like me" or "not like me." Coopersmith obtained a five week test-retest-reliability coefficient of .88, and later a three year test-retest-reliability of .70 was found. Validity of the scale is suggested by positive correlations with teachers' ratings of adjustment, sociogram ratings, and inverse correlations with measures of anxiety.[6]

The third measure was the Iowa Test of Basic Skills-Reading is a widely used reading achievement test. This test was administered both as a pre and posttest for each session.

The parents of the participating students were interviewed and each were asked to answer 11 questions on the Parental Views of the Urban Leadership Program. The questions focused on parental satisfaction with the Program and their perception of the child's feelings about this educational experience.

Findings

The results of the evaluation for this project included the last two of the three 10 week sessions held during the school year. The evaluation procedures at the beginning of the first session were not all completed. As a result, the combined scores of the last two sessions for the 1974-75 academic year were included in the findings.

Self Esteem Inventory. Each of the 50 students in the two sessions were administered the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory both as a pre-test and post-test. A "t"-test was utilized to ascertain differences between the pre and post-test scores and the "t"-test results were found nonsignificant. The pre-test mean score was 34.18 and the post-test score was 35.36. These mean scores are almost identical to the scores that have reported on this self-esteem inventory in other studies.

School Attitude Inventory consisted of 20 items focusing on measuring students' perceptions of the Urban Leadership Program. In response to all but one item, the students scored more favorably in the posttest than the pretest. A total of 555 "yes" responses were recorded by the students at the end of both sessions as compared to 410 "yes" responses before the sessions. The only item on which no change occurred from pre and posttest scores was "Do you enjoy writing?" However, the overall response indicated that the students' perceptions of school had improved over each 10 week period.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills-Reading. The mean grade equivalent pretest score was 4.86. The difference in score gains from the pretest to the posttest was statistically significant at .005 level as measured by a "t" test. Approximately two-thirds of the students made grade equivalent score gains of at least 1.0 over a 10 week period.

Parental Views of the Urban Leadership Program. This 11 item questionnaire was utilized as a measure to obtain parent's views about their child's participation

in the Program. The teachers and community aides were in close contact with the parents throughout each 10 week session. Likewise, parents were encouraged to visit their child in the school. At the end of each term, the parents were visited by the community aides and asked, in an interview format, 11 questions about their perceptions of the Urban Leadership Program. A total of 47 parents were interviewed and on eight questions, over 90% of the parents gave affirmative responses. About 20% of the parents believed they would like more opportunities to become invloved with the Program. The interviews did give support to observational data and feedback from students that this project was receiving strong parental approval and support.

Summary

The Urban Leadership Program provided sixth graders an opportunity to gain an awareness of careers. The planned experiences in the world of work provides the children a bridge between their neighborhood and the mainstream urban community. This action-oriented Program focused on offering these students the skills, knowledge, attitudes and experiences for an improved understanding of both careers and themselves.

The findings of the evaluation indicated that positive changes had occurred in each 10 week session. The improved reading scores indicated that the exploratory career experiences may have developed a greater interest and improved skills in reading. Considerable emphasis was placed on developing teacher-made individualized reading materials which were closely tied in with careers. The reading materials had an obvious relationship with the total curriculum of the Urban Leadership Program. As a group, the students scored below the national norms; however, statistically significant (.005) improvements were readily achieved.

Slight, though not significant, improvements were made in self esteem scores. Self esteem scores are quite stable; therfore, a substantial improvement was not expected.[7] The scores do indicate the children were not adversely affected by

an innovative program. The improved attitudes toward school as measured by the School Attitude Inventory points out that school was perceived as a more beneficial learning environment by the participants. The broadly scoped of parents without a doubt had a good influence on the childrens' changing attitudes toward school. The new experiences of observing adults in work roles, perceived by society as successful, may have impressed them considerably. The unified goal of providing a community action career program may have been more meaningful to the students than they encountered in their previous educational experiences.[8]

Career education in 1976 is "in." This Urban Leadership Program is a response to the evident need to provide young people with developmental programs that provide students with a firm background for understanding the world of work. This Program is one example of how to achieve this objective in career education.

Footnotes

[1]B. Geraldine Lambert, Barbara Rothchild, Richard Altland and Laurence B. Green. Adolescence. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1972. pp.265-68.

[2]Robert J. Havighurst, Richard Graham, and Don Eberly. "American Youth in the Mid-Seventies," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. LVI (1972). pp. 1-13.

[3]Stanley Coopersmith. The Antecedents of Self-Esteem. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1967. pp. 265-66.

[4]Allen H. Frerichs. "Relationship of Self-Esteem of the Disadvantaged to School Success," The Journal of Negro Education. Vol. XXX (Spring 1971). pp. 117-121.

[5]Morris Rosenberg. Society and the Adolescent Self Image. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965. pp. 12-16.

[6]R. Epstein and A. Komarita. "Self-Esteem, Success-Failure, and Locus of Control in Negro Children," Developmental Psychology. IV (1971). pp. 2-8.

[7]Rae Carlson. "Stability and Change in Adolescent's Self Image," Child Development. XXXVI (1965). pp. 659-666.

[8]Robert W. Cole. "Apprenticeship is the Answer," Phi Delta Kappan. LVI No. 9 (May 1975). pp. 601-604.

Abstract

Urban Leadership Program

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The major purpose of the Urban Leadership Program was to develop competencies for sixth graders in order to gain an awareness and knowledge of opportunities in careers. The Program is funded by ESEA, Title III and is offered to 75 sixth graders in the Einstein Public Schools in Chicago, Illinois. Each student attended one of the three ten week sessions offered during the 1974-75 school year.*

This career program was community centered. Each student served an internship in an agency or business for about two weeks. The student "shadowed" an individual on the job. Before the internship, the child would study about the career he would encounter on the internship. Additionally, the students, as a group visited agencies which would enable them to gain a better understanding of the total community from which the children are basically isolated. Indivudualized reading skills are emphasized in order to improve the childrens' understanding of careers. Students study careers utilizing a wide range of instructional procedures and most are dependent on reading skills.

* The students live in a severely depressed neighborhood composed of high rise apartments.

The Urban Leadership Program was evaluated in several ways. The students were administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading Tests a pre and posttest in each 10 week session. The improvement in readin scores was statistically significant at the .005 level as measured by test. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was similarily administer Though the results were nonsignificant, a slight improvement in self e levels were reported. A school attitude inventory was constructed for this Program and the results indicate that attitudes toward school imp considerably over each 10 week span. Parents also gave strong approva to the Program as recorded by interviews and questionnaires.